



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Identification of English Learners for the 2020-21 School Year

Background Information

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of schools in Wisconsin. Districts responded by leveraging remote instruction and virtual learning. As we move into the 2020-21 school year, it is expected that many districts will need to continue virtual learning in some form. This document is designed to help districts navigate the challenges of hybrid and virtual learning as it relates to the identification of English learners.

While virtual learning helps bridge gaps in instruction, most standardized testing is not able to be done virtually. This is a barrier to formally identifying English Learners (ELs), as a formal EL identification requires the administration of a standardized English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment. The standard WIDA ELP assessments are not designed to be administered virtually.

In May of 2020, the U.S. Department of Education provided guidance on the identification of ELs during periods when schools are not able to have students in the building.¹ This guidance allows some flexibility in EL identification in the event that students are not able to attend school in person, complicating the standard EL identification process.

Please note that while this guidance provides flexibility in identifying ELs, it does not waive the federal requirement that ELs be identified and be provided language services within 30 days of enrollment, nor any parental notification requirements.

To support districts and students for whom in-person ELP screening is not possible, WIDA has created the WIDA Remote Screener, which will assist in making EL determinations. This provisional screener does not fully replace the standard WIDA ELP screeners, but it can be used as one of multiple measures to make an EL determination for students who are newly enrolling.

¹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605143.pdf>

The State of Wisconsin has been using a supplemental measure of English proficiency to inform classification and reclassification decisions for several years now. The Multiple Indicator Protocol (MIP) is a standardized rubric for assessing student language use in classroom contexts.² Combining data from these tools with answers from the Home Language Survey (HLS) and other information from parents and teachers, districts may make EL identification decisions for students unable to engage in in-person learning during the first 30 days of enrollment.

While primarily written to support fall 2020 enrollment, this guidance document applies to enrollments throughout the 2020-21 school year. For students enrolling after September 2020, October dates in this document can be interpreted as “within two months of enrollment”.

Identification of Potential ELs

Home Language Survey

Administering the HLS to the parents of every newly enrolled student is the core of fairly and equitably identifying students in need of language instruction. The HLS should be a standardized part of the enrollment process, and must be completed as normal.³

Districts may opt to administer only the first two questions of the HLS to parents, provided there is a mechanism in place to follow up with any additional questions, should the full HLS indicate that more are warranted. The vast majority of students will not need to answer further questions based on the answers to the first two. Only for students with complicated language backgrounds will the need for additional questions be indicated.

The HLS will indicate whether ELP screening is necessary for the student.

On-site ELP Screening

The K W-APT, Kindergarten MODEL, and the WIDA Screener remain the most accurate standardized ELP screeners. Districts are encouraged to use these screeners if possible, as they do not require follow-up observations.

State and local guidelines for COVID-19 control and mitigation should not interfere with administering these assessments. Common guidelines include social distancing, limiting the number of students in a room at one time, frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces, etc. It is assumed that most if not all of these directives can be accomplished while complying with the allowable testing environments listed in the Test Administration Manuals (TAMs) and the Accessibility and Accommodations Supplement.

² <https://dpi.wi.gov/english-learners/el-identification-and-placement> (see Chapter 15)

³ <https://dpi.wi.gov/english-learners/el-identification-and-placement> (see Chapter 1)

For example, the WIDA Screener TAM already suggests that students be seated 4-6 feet apart, and the Accessibility and Accommodations Supplement allows for Adaptive and Specialized Equipment or Furniture, Specific Seating, and Individual and Small Group Administration for all students. If a state or local directive appears to conflict with the allowable testing requirements, please reach out to DPI for guidance.

Screeners do not need to be administered on district property, but they must be administered in a secure environment, by trained district staff, and if computerized, on district owned and managed computers. These tests are secure instruments, and therefore it is not permissible for anyone outside of the students being administered the test and the proctors to be exposed to the test content. This includes parents/guardians, relatives, and other individuals who have not been trained and signed non-disclosure forms.

Within these limitations however, it is permissible to administer the ELP assessments in alternate environments, better able to meet health and safety requirements. This may include the addition of protective barriers, furniture designed for easy cleaning, well ventilated spaces, etc.

Remote ELP Screening

If it is not possible for a district to administer one of the standard ELP screeners within the first 30 days of a student's enrollment due to the student engaging full time in virtual or eLearning, the WIDA Remote Screener can be administered to meet the 30 day timeline.

The provisional WIDA Remote Screener is designed to be administered over the phone or over a video chat, based on a packet of student materials printed either by the student's parent or the school. For young students and students with very limited English proficiency, interpretation support and parental support is recommended. The WIDA Remote Screener does not assess Writing, and the screener for grades K-1 only assesses Oral language.

This screener does not provide the same level of accuracy that the standard WIDA screeners provide. For this reason it may need to be supplemented with additional proficiency information in order to make an EL determination. This additional information may be needed to verify the EL status of students initially assessed with this tool, as well as to inform decision making when the Remote Screener is unable to return a clear determination of EL status.

Process for Remote Screening

Planning

1. If a district foresees the need to use the WIDA Remote Screener, the staff responsible for this screening must be identified and pass the training for the Remote Screener in the WIDA Secure Portal.

2. Within the first 30 days of a student's enrollment, the district must have a mechanism to identify which students will be engaging in virtual learning over this period, and will not be able to take on-site assessments.
3. Revise standard notifications to parents regarding the HLS, EL identification process, etc., to summarize the new processes due to COVID-19 impacts.
4. Ensure that students are provided with the student packet, downloadable from the WIDA Secure Portal.
 - a. Districts can print and mail the student packet, have parents pick up the materials, deliver them, or have parents print the materials themselves.
 - b. The materials are designed to be printed in color, but can be printed in black and white.
 - c. They are not designed to be provided electronically.
 - d. They are not considered secure test materials, and parents should be instructed to destroy them after the assessment is complete.
 - e. Districts may wish to consider including supplemental information for parents in a language they can understand if they are not able to verbally explain what these materials are to be used for.
5. Districts must determine if interpretation support will be required, and ensure that young students, and students with very limited English proficiency, have support for engaging with the test materials and test proctor.
6. The Remote Screener takes between 10 and 30 minutes to administer, depending on the student's level of English proficiency and their comfort level engaging with the test materials, phone or video conference software, and the test administrator. Schedule a time with the student's parents for when the screening can occur.
7. Administer the screener as outlined in the WIDA training.
 - a. If the student has or potentially has a disability, it is important to fairly evaluate that student in a timely manner. Work jointly with special education staff to determine how best to accommodate the disability while accurately assessing the student's level of English proficiency. EL students with disabilities must be provided both the language assistance and disability-related services they are entitled to under federal law.

Assessing English Proficiency

1. Once the remote screening has been completed, the test administrator will have a provisional EL classification. Whether additional proficiency information is needed will depend on the result of the Remote Screener.
 - a. Newcomer or Beginner
 - i. Code as ELP 1 or 2.
 - ii. The Classroom Observation MIP can be used as a second piece of information to confirm EL status and provide evidence to support choosing ELP 1 or 2.
 - b. Developing level of English proficiency

- i. Code as ELP 3 or 4.
 - ii. The Classroom Observation MIP can be used as a second piece of information to confirm EL status and provide evidence to support choosing ELP 3, 4, or Proficient, 7. If the MIP is not used, the student cannot be identified as Proficient, ELP 7.
- c. Fluent or highly proficient: ELP 7
 - i. No additional information is required.
- 2. Manual Determination protocol
 - a. In the case that there is disagreement between the WIDA Remote Screener and the MIP, districts should holistically consider all evidence they have for student language proficiency to make a final EL determination. These evidence may include:
 - i. Existing HLS, Remote ELP Screener, and MIP results
 - ii. Other content area artifacts or assessments
 - iii. Supplemental parental interviews
 - b. When all evidence is considered, assign a reasonable ELP code:
 - i. For English proficient students, assign them ELP 7.
 - ii. For students who are not English proficient, determine if they are a beginner or an intermediate English speaker.
 - 1. Assign beginners ELP 1.
 - 2. Assign intermediate students ELP 3.
 - 3. If you have the information and confidence to assign more specific scores from ELP 1-4, you may do so.
- 3. If the Classroom Observation MIP needs to be used, a final EL decision must be made and ELP codes pushed from the SIS to WISEdata by Monday, October 26.
- 4. Anytime prior to October 26, a standard ELP screener may be administered if the student is available for in-person testing, and the normal process for identification followed. This supplants the results of the Remote Screener protocol.
- 5. Ensure that this process and the results are captured in the student's academic record.

Training

Like the standard ELP screeners, training for the WIDA Remote Screener is hosted in the WIDA Secure Portal. Training is much shorter than other screener trainings. As this is a much more challenging screener to administer and score, districts are encouraged to assign experienced ESL staff to this screener, if possible. Experience scoring the Speaking domain for the paper version of ACCESS for ELLs or a screener is preferred, and the standard Speaking scoring quiz must be passed.

Parental Notification

Standard parental notification forms may need to be updated or supplemented to reflect the new identification process. Parents should understand this process, and should have the option of requesting one of the standard ELP screeners, should they be able to be administered.

Federal law has very specific parental notification requirements for the parents of ELs which must occur within the first 30 days of school.⁴ While the U.S. Department of Education has provided some flexibility in EL identification, they have not provided any waivers or flexibility around parental notification. A second notification to parents will be necessary if any part of the identification process happens outside of the first 30 days of school.

Concerns about Misidentifications

Districts must make every effort to ensure accurate identification of ELs. In the case of an ambiguous or unclear EL determination resulting from the process outlined within this guidance, districts must use a standard WIDA Screener to resolve the student's EL status. We recognize this as not only an educational imperative but also a civil rights obligation.

Reporting EL Status

The district SIS pushes student enrollment and demographics to WISEdata nightly. This information is used to populate WISEdash for Districts, for federal monitoring, and as the core data for our accountability systems. EL status is one of the elements that gets sent to WISEdata, captured in students' ELP codes.

The deadline of October 26, 2020 for the finalization of EL status is to ensure that correct students are pulled for the roster of the annual ACCESS for ELLs assessment. For students enrolling after the start of school but before this date, a preliminary ELP code must be entered into the SIS based on available information of proficiency. Students enrolling after this date will need to be manually added to the roster for ACCESS testing.

⁴ <https://dpi.wi.gov/english-learners/el-identification-and-placement> (See Chapter 3, page 2.)